

Hosea 1:1-2:1

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Preacher: Calum Jack

[0:00] The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, son of Beri, during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam and Jehoash, king of Israel.

When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, go marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her. For like an adulterous wife, this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.

So he married Goma, daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. Then the Lord said to Hosea, call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel.

In that day I will break Israel's bow in the valley of Jezreel. Goma conceived another again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, call her Loru-hima, which means not loved, for I will no longer show love to Israel, that I should at all forgive them.

Yet I will show love to Judah, and I will save them, not by bow, sword, or battle, or by horses or horsemen, but I, the Lord their God, will save them. After she had weaned Loru-hima, Goma had another son.

[1:19] Then the Lord said, call him Loami, which means not my people, for you are not my people, and I am not your God. Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted.

In the place where it was said to them, you are not my people, they will be called children of the living God. The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together, and will appoint one leader, and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.

Say to your brothers, my people, and your sisters, my loved one. Isn't it just wonderful to sing these songs that remind us of our privilege, that we are, by his grace, the church of the redeemed.

And that's going to be a theme that we're going to be thinking about over the coming weeks. If you want to open up to that chapter that Sarah read for us earlier. And some of you, if you're sort of in community group, or this morning, may be thinking, why, Callum, why?

Why are we looking at this particular book of the Bible at this particular time? Well, the truth is that over the last 10 years, we've sort of been working our way through in part or in whole books of the Bible.

[2:40] And we're now sort of over 40, preached through our way through 40 books of the Bible of the 66 books. So we're beginning to kind of look around at what books haven't we preached on, as we try and kind of get that balance of preaching Old Testament, New Testament.

We did 2 Thessalonians. We're going to do Hosea. We're going to do 1 Timothy next. And then we're going to be in Zechariah. So just trying to get the balance in Scripture, because we want to preach the whole council.

We want to preach the whole council of God, not just the bits that we like, but the bits that make us give us pause for thought, because all of Scripture is God-breathed, isn't it?

And given to us for our benefit and for our good. So last June or May, when I was putting this together, it seemed a good idea to kind of, this was one of the books that we need to tackle.

And as we do so, I trust that, you know, as we've begun to kind of look at some of the, like Revelation, we spent time in Genesis and so on, actually our spirit kind of thrills as the Word has opened up to us, as we study it together, either in a community group or on a Sunday morning, and actually we see, we hold beautiful things in His law and in His words.

[3:56] And Scripture's own testimony about itself is born true. Hebrews 4.12, the Word of God is alive and active. It's sharper than any double-edged sword.

It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joint and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. It has incredible things in us as we open it up, as we look at it together.

So let me just pray briefly. Lord, we ask once again that you would open the book to our hearts and our hearts to the book. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, let's jump in. Verse 1 gives us the context. The Word of the Lord comes to Hosea. This is a classic signature opener indicating that Hosea, which interestingly means salvation, is a prophet of God.

And if you're new to looking into these things, then the prophets in the Old Testament had a unique role amongst the people of God. Yes, there were times of foretelling what was going to happen, but mainly it was foretelling.

[5:07] Speaking into the situation at the time, not with random things and in a random manner, but all in line with the covenant that God had established with His people, that binding agreement that we looked at when we looked in the book of Exodus, that combination of love and law that God had established and set out the terms of what is a love relationship between Him and His people.

And we've talked about in the past, again, if we knew, that the nearest equivalent of this kind of binding agreement, or covenant agreement, as it's called, that we have today, is the wedding ceremony.

It's a combination of love, where love is expressed and celebrated, but also law, promises made to love each other through sickness and in health, not an abandoning, you know, for healthier options or whatever.

And all of these promises, all of that celebration, all of that binding agreement is there to help love flow, to keep the marriage safe, to hold back from giving in to temptation, and set and chart out where you want the marriage to go, where love will flourish.

As we remember our promise, I made a promise, I'm going to keep to it. And we ask the Lord to help us with that. Prophets were there then to help the people of God know how to live faithfully before a faithful God.

[6:39] But also they were there to keep that binding agreement to announce the penalties that were agreed when the people of God in that generation walked away from the commitment that they had made.

So prophets are a powerful combination of preacher, exhorter, covenant enforcer, and restorer. And we'll see some of that, a combination of these things, as we go through Hosea.

Further in verse 1, we're given a list of the kings of Judah and one king of Israel. Again, the purposes of those are helpful to know what was going on at the time, what the time frame was.

And again, if you're new, it helps us understand that though the nation of Israel was at time one people with 12 tribes at a certain point, 930 BC, there was an internal civil war.

And the 10 northern tribes kept the name Israel. And the two southern tribes of Benjamin and Judah became known as Judah. And so this prophecy is primarily, as we'll see, addressed to those 10 northern tribes and that they have gone astray.

[7:59] And we'll see that Judah at this time remains faithful. And the last bit of detail then we can extract in terms of context from verse 1 is the time frame.

We know that these kings were in the 8th century BC and that Hosea is roughly preaching around as a ministry between 720 and 725 BC before Christ came.

Again, piecing together from, because we know that Isaiah had a ministry at that time and others, we know that Israel was experiencing a time of relative prosperity.

Outwardly, things were politically, economically secure. They'd settled deals with Egypt and Assyria that maintained their political security and brought economic prosperity.

And it's not even that in those days there was no religious devotion. In fact, they were very religious. The festivals and so on, the feasts, were well attended in those days.

[9:04] But Isaiah kind of gives us a real insight into the spiritual situation in that time. He sums it up perfectly. Isaiah 29 verse 13, where the Lord says, These people come near me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship of me is based on merely human rules that they have been taught. Tradition, religion, religiosity, but not relationship, which ultimately the Lord was looking for.

And that superficiality, skin-deep commitment, was leading to not heart transformation, but rather heart degradation, rampant corruption.

Justice was going to the highest bidder. Though there was the outward show of religiosity, there was no inward reality. And that was being shown in the way that they were living their lives. Without the love of God, the Spirit of God flowing in their hearts, there was not this subsequent adherence to the love of God and the love of neighbor that ultimately the covenant was calling them to.

[10 : 21] And the Lord, again through Isaiah, in the Old Testament and as Jesus does in the New, he describes his people, the church in terms of his bride.

Isaiah 54 verse 5, the Lord says, Your maker is your husband. And so that marriage illustration was used throughout the scriptures to kind of denote the relationship between the intimate and close relationship between God and his people.

And that helps, I think, connect us, doesn't it, with the rest of the chapter. Because these verses, they are shocking. And in a sense, the whole of the book is quite shocking.

But that is supposed to be the point. The vividness of it is meant to shock a complacent people into a deep, deep realization and conviction about the state of affairs, the state of affairs, the reality of the situation between them and God, to speak through the superficiality and the kind of skin-deep commitment and say, this is not really how things are.

This is how things are. As Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Old Testament, these stories in the Old Testament are there to teach the New Testament church and to help us to understand the dynamics between us and God.

[11 : 45] And so we see two spiritual dynamics sort of personified in the story of Hosea. And there are three things that come out in this first chapter.

There's an unfaithful one. And then there's the fruit of unfaithfulness. And then finally, we're led to reflect and marvel on the faithful one. So we're introduced to the people, two people who will embody the truths that God wants to convey.

And verse two, Hosea is to go and marry a woman who will be unfaithful to him. And we're introduced to the unfaithful one. And as we look at these things, I want to tread carefully because there's a sensitivity to the topics just because in any given church, there is a sensitivity about these, there can be a sensitivity about these issues.

Now there is a little debate over whether Gomer's adultery started after the marriage. But irrespective, the point is made clear there in the second part of verse two.

For like an adulterous wife, this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord. So why is the Lord allowed this? Why is he creating this situation?

[13 : 03] Well, of course, it's unique. The role of the prophets is unique. It's not meant to be a repeatable thing. But Duncan Gibb, who has led our community group study really well this week, he helpfully shared a comment, presumably from a Scottish preacher, who conveyed that part of the reason that God did it this way because these things were better felt than tilt.

That there's a sort of a relational reality that needs to be comprehended. That this is not about superficiality. This is not about religion. It's not about tradition. But actually, it's about a relationship. And when that relationship breaks down, there is deep hurt and devastation. Remember that, you know, on a wedding day, love and promises to lifelong faithfulness and fidelity are exchanged.

I give myself to you. I am yours. And I give myself to you. You are mine. Two become one in an intimate, exclusive, one flesh union together.

And Jesus pronounces over such a union, Mark 10 verse 9, what God has joined together. Let no one separate. And I wonder if the Lord is kind of particularly uses this as an illustration of the reality that is going on between the nation of Israel and them and their unfaithfulness to him, the faithful God.

[14 : 28] Because when you look at the Ten Commandments, it's almost as if the commandment relating to adultery and breaking it involves the breaking of so many others, of coveting and lying and cheating and dishonoring and stealing and so on.

It's like a huge, ugly vortex that cascades as so many other of sins are drawn in as the thing gains momentum. And as well as the breaking of these things, there is the breaking of this sacred covenant, a heartbreaking, gut-wrenching, ultimate betrayal that is involved in it and many others beside of the aggrieved party who in this case is God's.

So God uses Gomer's unfaithfulness to betray both the ugliness of Israel's sin and the pain in the heart of God, the one who has ultimately been betrayed and aggrieved.

That the church of the Old Testament has spurned his love and chased after the affections of other gods and other things. And in that time, Israel's unfaithfulness took two forms.

Firstly, political. Like I said earlier, they made these alliances with Egypt and with Assyria. They no longer trusted the Lord alone for their security to be lord over them, to be in a sense their ultimate king, their number one.

[15 : 57] They took matters into their own hands, relied on human wisdom, human strength, human ingenuity, and as it were, got into bed with the leaders of other nations, trusting them for their security and their prosperity and not the Lord.

And then secondly, spiritually, God no longer had their exclusive affection. They gave themselves to other gods and idols whose worship at times, as we'll discover, involved sexual acts with temple prostitutes and so on.

Well, that was, of course, then. How does this begin to land with us today? Of course, it lands pretty hard because we realize that we're supposed to see that in this story we are not Hosea, that is the Lord's, but we are Gomer.

We too are in an age when the visible church has in parts gone adulterously astray, beset by false teaching like the prosperity gospel, approving, often practicing, unrecognizable morality as it's drifted from believing the Bible's standards and believing the Bible itself and trusting the Lord and His wisdom.

It's beset by legalism on one side and license on the other. Crazy views of the Spirit that has it blowing up on one side and not enough view of the Spirit as it drying up on the other side.

[17 : 27] that we too in our relative affluence, especially in the Western worlds, and even in the midst of economic uncertainty, we are amongst the richest nations in the world and the richest people in the world.

We are caused to ask, has our hearts, have we drifted? Where do our, truly do our highest and chiefest affections lie in what are we putting our security and our trust?

Are we working on our own strength or trusting Him? And of course, as this is addressed, not only is this addressing the church as a whole, it's also addressing us as individuals because the church is made up of its parts.

And I guess then we're led to ask the question, where is the issue of our hearts before the Lord in these days? Remember what the Lord Jesus Christ said to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2, verse 4, where He reminded them.

Remember the Ephesian church, Paul spoke so affectionately and overflowing about them and their commitment. But a number of years later, they're being addressed by the Lord, Revelation 2, verse 4, and what does He say to them?

[18 : 48] You have abandoned your first love. And what does that look like in the life of a believer? How would we recognize if that were an issue for us?

Well, for some, there will be a return to trusting maybe the gods of the past in whom you trusted.

For others, that's worshipping at the foot of the idea of no God at all.

For others, that looks like lukewarmness, a cooling of love for the Lord, replacing it with higher affections for other things.

And those things that maintain and hold our highest affection, we can know what they are because these are the things that predominate our thinking. These are the things that if God took them away from us for whatever reason, we would completely abandon Him.

We would lose our trust in Him because we could never trust Him even in those situations. Issues to do with relationships, career, health, family, self-absorption, position, status, financial security, comfort, just the stuff of life that we think that we need.

[20 : 06] And if not the success for ourselves, then we live vicariously through our children. And not any of these things are necessarily wrong in themselves. They're often good things.

Without realizing it, these good things become God things in our lives. We take the Creator out of the Creator's position in our lives and replace them with created things.

And then we suddenly realize that actually though we profess with our lips that we're trusting God functionally, we're trusting in these things for our sense of value.

We're looking to these things to fulfill us. We're looking to these things to give to us the things that God can beautifully supply for us. A sense of value, a sense of worth, a sense of identity, a sense of fulfillment, a sense of being loved with a constant never-ending love.

And we look to them to provide these things for us, our affirmation and so on. And as we give ourselves to them, we abandon the values of the kingdom and start to adopt their values, their ways, their words.

[21:19] And these are the things that ultimately begin to absorb our time and our thinking. These are the things that keep us away from devotion to the Lord. These are the things that prevent us from enjoying just the beautiful sense of His presence that He offers to us, of His voice speaking to us through His word and through vivid fellowship together by His Spirit.

Of the joy, and of course the difficulty at times, but the joy and the safety of following His ways and letting those good things that we can extract that sense of centeredness that we grasp for Him, knowing that we are loved, not because of what we do, but because of what Christ has done.

And He has a settled opinion of us because of the cross. And that settles us in our lives. And that settledness and all that flows from it spills out into our homes, the places that we stay, and into our marriages and family life if we're married and able to have children.

But where we are distracted by these things, we're functionally, we're not, our affection are given over to other things. And that is what is shaping our values and our sense of worth and so on.

Then the beautiful things that can bring into our homes are lost. They're silent. There's no family prayer. There's no spiritual conversations.

[22:50] There's no Bible story with the kids as they're growing up. We were able to have kids. There's no singing with them. There's no sort of the joy of kind of the back and forth of learning a catechism or memory verses with them.

Our desire for godliness and our even ability to see that that would be a good thing diminishes. Our desire for the obedience of faith that the Spirit wants to bring as well as the fruit of the Spirit that He wants us to enjoy as we live the life of repentance.

Luther said, the whole of the Christian life is repentance turning away from the things that call upon our affection to turning to Him the one who is worthy of our affection. As we're caught up with these things and also maybe the trappings of religion and religiosity we learn as our faith becomes skin deep functionally elsewhere to bluff our way through even church fellowship with off-pat phrases and we find ourselves before we know it subconsciously without even knowing it just living a nominal Christian faith maybe backsliding that began just for weeks went on for months goes on to years and we lose a genuine relationship with the Lord.

the book of Hosea wants to speak into all our hearts no matter where we're at. We're only ever one prayer away from reintroducing Him into our lives and these realities that He would have for us.

So over the coming weeks and we're going to be a number of weeks in the book of Hosea let's open our hearts to the Lord and as the psalmist says Lord search me oh God know my heart test me and know my anxious thoughts see if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

[24:59] Let's make that a prayer for the coming weeks as we look at Hosea in community groups and on Sundays. So we're introduced to the context to the unfaithful one and then to the fruit of unfaithfulness seen of course in the names of the children.

Verse 4 the first boy is called Jezreel and is a reference to a massacre that happened in the valley of Jezreel you can read about it in 2 Kings chapter 9 and 10 when Jehu ended the wicked reign of Ahab and Jezebel at the Lord's command but executed a bloodthirsty revenge in that valley.

Jeroboam who's mentioned here was of the line of that first massacre by Jehu and actually by the time that Jeroboam dies and his son takes over from him his son will only be on the throne for six months and then the reign the end of the line of the reign of Jehu as is predicted here will end.

And also according to various sources the Assyrians who will come and conquer and exile the northern tribe of Israel will come through the valley of Jezreel the Lord will use a foreign government and nation to occupy and exile and bring the just punishment on the people of God they will come through the valley of Jezreel breaking Israel's bow as it's said here and ending them ultimately as a kingdom we can read about that in 2 Kings 10-15 verse 6 the second child who is not named as Hosea's and as we discussed in your community groups that leads many people to suspect that actually he is not the father Hosea doesn't run to the divorce courts as his right but he stays he remains faithful mirroring the faithfulness of God isn't it but her name is to be Lo-Ruhamah meaning not loved why?

well verse 6 because I will no longer show love to Israel and these are somber words aren't they? we see them echoed in revelation not just you know we're not just seeing them in the Old

Testament we see it in the New where God says I'm going to pull the lampstands from that area and he did these are things that we should not take lightly think oh that doesn't apply to us the people of God by their actions have excluded themselves and despite God's many attempts to send the prophets to lead them back they continue generation after generation to do what was evil in the eyes of the Lord and as he speaks these words they are somber but they will always be fair and they will always be utterly just and then verse 7 but the southern kingdom of Judah will still remain loved because among their kings who certainly weren't perfect there were faithful men and under king

[28:19] Hezekiah God saves Judah from the forces that overtake Israel from Assyria and not as he saves verse 7 by bow or sword or battle or by horse or by horseman actually when you read the account in 2nd Kings and 2nd Chronicles it is the Lord himself who beautifully saves his people Jerusalem is under siege but the Lord goes out Hezekiah puts his trust in the Lord and the Lord goes out by night and slays 180,000 of the Assyrian troops they wake up dead it says in the Bible and they skedaddle back up to Nineveh the capital of Assyria of Jonah fame where the king is then duly assassinated for his failure to conquer and you can again find that all recounted in Isaiah 2nd Kings and 2nd Chronicles see our God is in the business of saving our

God is in the business of saving his people himself and these things are always pointing forward aren't they to the cross where he himself shed his own blood that we might be saved and then verses 8 and 9 another child again not named as his is called Ioami not my people and these are chilling words because they are a 180 degree reversal of the covenant promise that we were reading about in Exodus chapter 6 verse 7 when we looked at the book of Exodus where God says I will take you as my people as this wedding ceremony of law and love and relationship and as they commit to one another the Lord says I will take you to be my people and I will be your God and you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians but they have abandoned him they have broken covenant they have broken faith with him and just as at the end of

Hosea's ministry the northern tribes of Israel will find that these words come true that they are exiled and they are removed from the lands so we see that there is an unfaithful one the fruits of unfaithfulness but beautifully and wonderfully and punctuated all through the book of Hosea our eyes are seen the ugliness of what can happen in the church of God and the people of God in our own hearts he points us again and again to the faithful one the one who is faithful who has made an everlasting covenant with his people listen to what he says verse 10 yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore which cannot be measured or counted in the place where I said to them you are not my people they will be called children of the living gods the people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together and they will appoint one leader and will go up out of the land for great will be the day of

Jezreel chapter 2 say to my brothers my people and your sisters my loved one of of course of of the prophets speak they speak of multiple things ahead somebody once explained it in the village that I grew up in the house that I grew up it looked out across the water to the Isle of Sky and you could see the coolant hills and from the distance from our house it looked like the hills were all in a line but as you get closer along to the Isle of sky and onto the island itself you see that the coolant they're actually not in a line they're one behind the other and it's the same with prophecy there are multiple hill points of fulfillment often when the prophets speak and so in the first instance the first hilltop if you like to which he is pointing is the partial fulfillment that will happen in the return from the exile in Babylon of both of the people of gods under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Ezra Haggai Zechariah and Nehemiah the people will be brought back and this time they will be rather than scattered as they were they will be planted in the land from which they were exiled and it's the valley of Jezreel because Jezreel means planted!

[32:57] So in the place of scattering there will be a planting of the people as they return the faithful one maintaining his promise to his people 70 years after the southern tribe also goes into exile our God is the one who is the faithful one who is faithful in the face of unfaithfulness but of course there's another hilltop isn't there in which these words find their complete fulfillment in Christ when he the Lord Jesus who was the true faithful remnant of Israel the stump of Jesse he the true faithful vine will have the branches ingrafted the nations will be brought in and there will be a number who cannot be numbered on that day when we go to be with him we will be like the sand of the seashore that cannot be counted and those who were not his people will be called children of

the living

God Paul speaks about these very verses in Hosea to the Romans in Romans chapter 9 as he speaks about God's sovereign choosing to bring the elect of the nations in both Jew and Gentile and he quotes chapter 1 verse 10 yet the Israelites will be like the sand of the seashore who cannot be measured or counted in the place where it was said of them you are not my children they will be called children of the living God and it is here in verse 10 we need to pause and it is here and if you look carefully at verse 10 you need to see yourself it's where we see ourselves that you and I are mentioned we are one of the grains of sand that cannot be numbered those of us who are his own we should see our names and our futures here in that verse that 2700 years ago these things were written and as they were written they were written about you and they were written about me but of course things were written long before even that before the creation of the world when you and I were chosen to be included by the faithful one who keeps his promises and who established that in his heart before time began so has seen it through to completion and he who has begun the good work in us the scriptures tell us we'll see it through to completion until the day of Christ Jesus our hope is not in ourselves it's always in him always in the faithful one so unchanging and so it's right that the hymn writer says loved before the dawn of time chosen by my maker hidden in my I am his and he is mine cherished for eternity you know as we look through the book of Hosea we need to open up our hearts we need to open up our lives and yes we're going to see ugly things but we are also going to be pointed to the one who is faithful whose grace is always greater than our sin and who has much greater purposes for us who has a more beautiful story to be worked out in our lives than any of the things that we would put our trust in so come open our hearts live and be encouraged to live lives faithful to the faithful one band are going to come and lead us in that final song just expressing!

God our Father we acknowledge that the things that we look at here are hard to look at there's a shocking element to them there's an ugliness and as we see those things we see something of the ugliness that is in our own lives but over that Lord we hear your voice calling we hear you knocking on the door of our hearts behold I stand and knock you open up and let me eat with you and you with me be renewed in a vivid relationship with me know my love and love me in return Lord lead us in this week speak to our hearts about you our faithful and woo our hearts win our hearts as we see your faithfulness and we are one afresh our affections are won over by you and the wonder of who you are so lead us on in this week we pray oh faithful one through Christ our Lord we ask it amen